



Self-Represented Litigation Network Self Assessment of Court Programs to Assist Self-Represented Litigants

Guidelines for Data Gathering

The Self-Represented Litigation Network includes two survey instruments with the Guide to Self Assessment of Court Programs to Assist Self-Represented Litigants. These **Guidelines for Data Gathering** set forth the process for court staff to follow in administering and scoring the surveys.

Exit Survey

There are two parts to conducting the **Exit Surveys**. First, the surveys must be administered and collected. Then the **Exit Surveys** must be entered into the **Access database**. We suggest that your team review these instructions in two steps. Review the section immediately below when you are preparing for and administering the survey in the court. Next, when you have collected the surveys and are ready to enter the **Exit Surveys** into the **Access database**, return to this document and review the section entitled "Data Entry Overview." Both sections contain technical and specific instructions that will be more relevant to you when you are ready to take the step described.

The **Access database** instructions assume that the person entering the data is familiar with Access and is using Access 2007. In addition, the **Access database** section is best understood with the **Access database** open and data being entered.

Administering the Survey

This form is designed to be administered to all persons as they leave the courthouse on a particular day or days. It has two parts:

- (1) The first part is for all court users and collects information regarding the accessibility and fairness of the court;
- (2) The second part seeks specific information from self-represented litigants.

The purposes of the exit survey are a) to obtain information from self-represented litigants about their court experience and b) to obtain similar information from all other court users to conduct an "environmental scan" of the accessibility and

fairness of the court overall and to provide a comparison of the general experience of all court users with that of the self-represented litigants.

The first two pages of the survey are taken from the National Center for State Courts "CourTools" project -- Measure 1 Access and Fairness. The National Center's description of the measure has written instructions that can be found on the internet at www.courttools.org. If you go to the CourTools website, you can enter the members section of the community of practice (by signing up for a free password). The community of practice webpage contains a discussion of practical steps that courts have found helpful to get higher response rates on these exit surveys.

Pages 3 and 4 of the survey are adapted from materials developed by the Trial Court Research and Improvement Consortium.

Important Note

There are several key questions that trigger the inclusion of various parts of the survey in certain Access database reports. It is important for court staff to know which of these questions are particularly important so that, during the administration of the survey, they can check to ensure that the questions are answered and answered appropriately.

The following are key questions on the survey for reporting purposes:

Question 16, "What is your role at the courthouse today?" causes the survey to be included in the data reports. If a respondent does not check a role, his or her survey will not be included in any reports.

Question 37, "What is your age?" causes a survey to be included in the self-represented litigant reports.

There are three unnumbered "threshold" questions – to be answered "yes" or "no" that are also critical.

Did you appear before a judicial officer today? causes the answers for questions 11 through 15 to be included in reports.

Are you a self-represented litigant? causes answers on the third and fourth pages of the survey to be included in reports about self-represented litigants.

Did you visit the court's [add name of self help program with a courthouse location to identify it (e.g., on the first floor) here] today? causes answers to questions 30 through 36 to be included in the reports

about litigant satisfaction with the self represented litigant assistance program.

Please ensure that staff who administer the survey are familiar with these key questions and the importance of completing these questions appropriately.

Tailoring the survey to local needs

Both parts of the survey employ standardized questions that allow for national comparisons among courts to further common knowledge and common solutions. You may choose to add questions to either part of the exit survey. Please do not delete or change the wording of the questions in the standard survey. You may add questions to address issues of local importance. When you do so, we suggest adding them on an additional page so that you retain the original numbering system.¹ You will not be able to use the **Access Database** to record or analyze the responses to the questions you add to the survey; you will have to hand-score the additional responses.

Choosing a typical day or days to conduct the survey

Critically important to the usefulness of your survey results is your choice of the day or days on which to conduct the survey. For purposes of the validity of the data from general court users, the day or days should be ordinary – typical of a routine day at court. It should not be the day before or the day following a long weekend. It should not be during either the summer or winter holiday periods. If the court's calendars are significantly different on different days of the week (for instance, if misdemeanor or traffic cases are only heard one day per week, or juvenile, family, or criminal matters are not heard on a particular day of the week), the court should administer the survey over several days to capture information from the persons coming to the courthouse for those types of cases or types of proceedings.

If the court conducts different types of proceedings at different courthouses (or at other facilities such as the county jail or the juvenile hall or detention center), the court should administer the survey at all of these facilities in order to obtain a fully representative sample of court users. However, if self-represented litigants do not appear at one or more of the court's facilities, the court need not administer the survey at those facilities. The primary focus of these **Tools**, including these surveys, is to assess how the court is working with self-represented litigants.

¹ If you renumber the survey, the survey will no longer correspond with the fields in the **Access database** and the data entry into the **Access database** will be far more difficult.

Where courts are located in facilities that house other county or municipal services, the court should administer the survey only at those parts of the building housing the court – the clerk’s office, the judges’ chambers and courtrooms, jury assembly room(s), etc. You should **not** obtain completed surveys from persons who are in the building to visit other governmental entities (such as the prosecutor, the county assessor or the city license bureau).

The goal of this self assessment survey is to get a full view of how the court is working for self-represented litigants. **Therefore, it is critically important to conduct the survey where and when self-represented litigants are present in the courthouse.** Your team should take into account the court’s scheduling of cases involving self-represented litigants. The survey should be conducted on a day or days when such cases are usually heard.

For instance, self-represented litigants appear most frequently in traffic, misdemeanor, family, domestic violence, landlord/tenant, and small claims cases. When are those cases scheduled? If motions in family cases are only heard on particular days of the week, one of those days should be included in the survey administration process. Similarly, the court should pay attention to the time of day during which it administers the surveys. For instance, if most hearings involving self-represented litigants take place in the morning, you should make sure that the surveys are administered in the morning.

While your team should strive to get as many self-represented litigant surveys as possible, when you are administering the surveys, you should provide the survey to all court users and not single out only the self-represented litigants.

The court’s objective should be to collect at least 100 completed surveys from self-represented litigants, at least 30 of which involve self-represented litigants who have had a hearing or trial appearance. If you are unable to obtain this number of surveys from self-represented litigants by conducting the survey at the courthouse exit, you may wish to administer it outside the self help center itself or in the hallway outside courtrooms holding hearings involving self-represented litigants to maximize the returns from this set of court users. Small courts may not be able as a practical matter to obtain this number of completed surveys from self-represented litigants.

Getting a good response to the Exit Survey

During the time period during which you will administer this survey, we suggest that you post signs prominently throughout the courthouse letting people know that you are conducting a survey and encouraging people to complete a survey before they leave the courthouse. Judges and court staff should mention the survey at points in which they are in contact with the public and ask them to take

a few minutes to take the survey. Judges should mention the survey at all hearings during the days that the surveys are being administered.

The survey is administered on paper. Court staff members or volunteers hand survey forms to everyone leaving the courthouse, or a particular location in the courthouse. Court users should be asked to complete the survey on the spot. Do not agree that people can take the forms with them and fill them out later. Responses will be increased if the surveys are placed on a clipboard with a pen or pencil attached to the clipboard by a string or chain. Courts administering the CourTools instrument have increased their response rate by giving away candy, soft drinks, doughnuts, lemonade, popcorn, or hot coffee to persons who complete the survey.

Steps should be taken to ensure the anonymity of every response. Some of the persons completing the survey forms will be known, even well-known, to the persons administering the survey process. Having the participants place their completed surveys into a box with a slot in the top (like a ballot box) will remove any possible concern that the staff conducting the process will read their results and connect them and their responses. Another, more expensive, alternative is to provide participants with blank envelopes into which to place their responses.

Choosing all the persons leaving the courthouse, or a part of the courthouse, should ensure a useful sample of court users. Persons administering the survey process should observe whether persons of a particular age, sex, race, apparent education level, etc. disproportionately decline to participate in the survey process and report that to the person in charge of the self-assessment process. Survey forms should be translated into languages frequently spoken by people using the courthouse.

Researchers find that non-English speakers do not complete surveys as readily as English speakers – even when the survey forms are in their preferred language. Having a bilingual staff member participate in the survey administration might increase the rate of response of non-English speakers. If your team notices that a certain group of people are under-represented in the surveys, your team might consider following up with this under-represented survey group by another method such as conducting a **Focus Group** targeted towards this group.

Alternative survey administration approaches

The approach recommended above purposefully obtains completed surveys from all persons using the courthouse, not just from self-represented litigants. This approach will allow the court to compare the views of self-represented litigants with the views of other court users, including represented litigants, lawyers, jurors, witnesses, etc.

If the court is interested only in the views and experiences of self-represented litigants, it can use a more targeted approach in administering surveys. It can give surveys to persons who are clearly self-represented litigants when they leave the front counter, when they leave a self help center or other court program to assist self-represented litigants, and when they leave a courtroom or mediation room. The court can tailor its data gathering to the specific purpose for which it wants to use the data. For instance, if it is only interested in the satisfaction of self-represented litigants with the services they obtain from a self help center, the court can administer surveys only to persons leaving that program.

Judge and Staff Survey

Circulate the Judge and Staff Survey to all judges who handle cases involving self-represented litigants and to all staff who encounter self-represented litigants in your court. Include staff who handle the public counters, the judges' personal and courtroom staff, self help center personnel, and other staff. Send it with a cover letter explaining the assessment program and setting a date for return of the survey form. Enclose an envelope in which to return the survey form. Ask the judges and staff not to put their names on the surveys.

Because the survey is anonymous it will not be possible to follow up with judges and staff to obtain their participation. However, you should send follow up emails or memos until you get virtually complete response from those to whom the surveys were sent.

Because the numbers of judge and staff surveys are so much smaller, court staff should tally them by hand and enter the results into a spreadsheet for analysis.

Data Entry Overview

The Self-Represented Litigation Network is providing an **Access database** into which the court staff can enter the data from the **Exit Surveys**. The **Access Database** will automatically generate standard reports of the **Exit Survey** data. Access is a dynamic system, so the reports and queries in Access present reports based on the data entered at the time the report or query is opened. It presents a view of the data as it stands at that moment. The information in the report is not saved. If more data is added or deleted, the reports and queries immediately change accordingly.

The database uses Access 2007 because of new features in Access 2007 which allow tables to be created which can be modified by court personnel to view the answers to questions based on the answers to other questions in the survey. For example, the court can see the report of responses to the Access to Court

questions (questions 1-10 of the survey) by *all litigants*, and then, with the click of a button, see the responses to these same questions by a selected group (i.e., *Hispanics, women, or Hispanic women*).

If you do not have Access 2007 or higher, you must buy it to use the database. It is possible to purchase only Access 2007 and not the remainder of the Office suite. This can keep the cost of the purchase of the software at no more than a few hundred dollars.

We suggest that the data entry be done by someone familiar with the Access program. We have provided you with both a blank database and a sample database with sample data included.

Data Entry Instructions. Data entry is done in Access through the form which matches the survey. If the survey has been modified so that the numbers have been changed, the data entry will be more difficult². If the numbers of the questions have been modified, the person entering the data will need to ensure that the answers to a question are entered in the right place in the form regardless of the fact that the numbers of the questions on the survey no longer correspond to the numbers on the form.

There are several key questions that trigger a survey to be included in certain Access Database Reports.

The following are key questions on the survey for reporting purposes.

Question 16, “What is your role at the courthouse today?” causes the survey to be included in the data reports. If a respondent does not check a role, his or her survey will not be included in any reports.

Question 37, “What is your age?” causes the survey to be included in the self-represented litigant reports.

There are three unnumbered “threshold” questions – to be answered “yes” or “no” that are also critical.

Did you appear before a judicial officer today? causes the answers for questions 11 through 15 to be include in reports.

Are you a self-represented litigant? causes answers on the third and fourth pages of the survey to be included in reports about self-represented litigants.

² For this reason, we have recommended that, if the team adds additional survey questions, the original numbering not be changed.

Did you visit the court's [add name of self help program with a courthouse location to identify it (e.g., on the first floor) here] today? causes answers to questions 30 through 36 to be included in the reports about litigant satisfaction with the self represented litigant assistance program.

Data entry staff should be particularly attentive to the correct entry of answers to these questions into the database.

Getting started on the data entry

To enter the data into the database, transfer the database entitled **SRLN³ survey database** to your computer⁴. To do this, copy the database to the location where you want to keep your database. It is better to *copy* the database rather than to *import* the data into a new database. If you *import* the data, the forms, queries and reports will all show up as one list, rather than in separate categories for forms, queries and reports. If you *copy* the database, the separate categories will also transfer. You will then find the form under the "forms" tab, the queries referred to below under the "queries" tab, and the reports referred to below under the "reports" tab.

Overview of the database forms, queries, and reports

There are several key documents that you will use for reporting data from this database:

One form "***Exit Survey – All Court Users***" used for entering the data you collect.

(NOTE: we suggest that you not view or use the table, but use the form instead);

Four "data" queries which show you charts which result from your data. These queries all have interactive functions that allow the reviewing team to see the results from all people who responded to these questions and also to look at subsets of the data based on certain criteria (i.e. the answers of "Hispanic women" or "party/represented by an attorney").

al: Access to the Courts 1-10 which shows you collected data from questions 1-10 on the survey;

all: Fairness 11-15 which shows you collected data from questions 11-15 on the survey;

³ "SRLN" stands for Self-Represented Litigant Network.

⁴ You may see a security warning at the top of the page when you open the database. If you click on the "Options" button on this warning, you can then select "enable the contents."

all: Fairness 11-15 (SRL only) which shows you collected data from questions 11-15 on the survey from self-represented litigants only (not other court users); and

aV: SRL Satisfaction 30-36 which shows you collected data from questions 30-36.

Four additional “count” queries which show you the **number of people** whose answers are reflected in the four queries listed immediately above.

For example, you can see the average score given to questions 1-10 of the **Exit Survey** by looking at the query **al: Access to the Courts 1-10**. If you want to know how **many responses** are included in that query, you would open the associated query **al: Access to the Courts 1-10 (Count)**. This will show you the **number of responses** to each question 1-10. If only 1 person responded to a question (e.g. one Hispanic woman), you may not give that result much weight and might consider how to get additional feedback from that type of person. Alternatively, if the average score is the result of responses from 100 people and the average score is lower than you want to meet your goals for your court, your team might consider looking more closely at that issue.

These “count” queries are:

al: Access to the Courts 1-10 (Count) which shows you the number of responses to questions 1-10 on the survey;

all: Fairness 11-15 (Count) which shows you the number of responses to questions 11-15 on the survey;

all2: Fairness 11-15 (SRL-Count) which shows you the number of responses to questions 11-15 on the survey from self-represented litigants only (not other court users); and

aV: SRL Satisfaction 30-36 (Count) which shows you the number of responses to questions 30-36.

(NOTE: There are other queries which are needed to generate the reports in the database which are in grey in the list of queries. You do not need to look at or change these queries. They operate automatically.)

Four reports which show you charts which result from your data

III Court User Information (all court users) which collects information relating to section III of the Survey;

III and IV SRL Litigant Information which collects information relating to sections III and IV of the Survey;

III/V Other Comments which collects information relating to sections III and V of the Survey; and

IV: Helpful and frustrating which collects information relating to section IV of the Survey.

Once data is entered into the database by using the form “**Exit Survey – All Court Users**”, the eight queries and four reports are generated automatically based on the data entered.

Entering the data.

We suggest that you **only enter data through the form “Exit Survey - All Court Users”**, since it will force you to keep the data entry consistent and make the reporting standard. If data is entered in an inconsistent way, the reports will not report accurate information.

The form follows the survey exactly and has selection choices for each entry that must follow a certain data entry protocol. Questions 1-27 are listed at the top of the form and questions 28-40 are listed at the bottom of the form. The numeric values for the surveys (options in which litigants can rank choices by a scale of 1-5) must be filled in with an option between 1 and 5 or you will get an error message.

If someone who took the survey did not answer a question, you are **not required** to fill in any answer. However, please recall that the reports identify someone as a **court user** if that person answered **question 16, “What is your role at the courthouse today?”** The reports identify someone as a **self-represented litigant** if that person answered **question 37, “What is your age?”** Finally, as an additional check on the data, certain survey answers are included only if a survey responds “yes” to one of the three threshold questions as described on page 2 above. If these questions are not completed in the form, the survey answers will not appear in certain queries and reports.

If you have more than one court location and enter this information consistently in the form under section 1, the data will be divided between the court locations. If you do not want information split into court locations, do not enter the court location into the database.

Viewing queries and reports.

A. “Data” Queries. Once you enter all of the surveys into the database by entering data through the form for each survey completed, you can view your data. Part of the information is presented in “data” queries to allow you to manipulate the charts to see different views of the same data.

The “data” queries are

al: Access to the Courts 1-10 which shows you collected data from questions 1-10 on the survey;
all: Fairness 11-15 which shows you collected data from questions 11-15 on the survey;
all: Fairness 11-15 (SRL only) which shows you collected data from questions 11-15 on the survey from self-represented litigants only (not other court users); and
aV: SRL Satisfaction 30-36 which shows you collected data from questions 30-36.

When you view each query, you will see grey boxes at the top and bottom of the chart area. The grey boxes include the choices by which you can sort the data. The boxes do not change the data; they simply allow you to see the result with certain filters.

For example, in the query **al: Access to the Courts 1-10**, you see the answers to the first 10 questions of the survey on access to the courts. If you want to see how a certain group of people responded to these questions, you can click the drop down box for “role” and select the group or groups you are interested in.

If you are interested in how attorneys answered these questions, you can put a check mark before the “attorney” box under the “16 role” box and make sure that no other box in this category is checked. The results to the survey questions 1-10 will immediately change to show you how attorneys answered these questions. To see the responses of the entire group of surveys again, go back and check all of the boxes under the “16 role” box again. The original view of the query will come back onto the screen. In other words, the drop-down boxes allow you to filter the data easily according to criteria you select. The drop-down boxes do not modify or change the data.

For the queries **al: Access to the Courts 1-10**, **all: Fairness 11-15**, and **all: Fairness 11-15 (SRL only)**, you can see different views based on questions 16-21 of the survey: role, court activity, case type, frequency at court, gender, race and by court location.

For the query **aV: SRL Satisfaction 30-36**, you can see different views based on gender, race, age, gross income, education and court location.

B. “Count” Queries. Part of the information is presented in “count” queries to allow you to see how many people responded to each question and manipulate the charts to see different views of the same “count” data.

For example, you can see the average score given to questions 1-10 of the **Exit Survey** by looking at the query **al: Access to the Courts 1-10**, as explained immediately above. If you want to know how **many responses** are included in

that query, you would open the associated query **al: Access to the Courts 1-10 (Count)**. This will show you the **number of responses** to each question 1-10. Like the “data” queries” discussed above, you can use the drop-down boxes to see the response rate for only a portion of the survey responses (e.g. “Hispanic women”).

If only 1 person responded to a question (e.g. one Hispanic woman), you may not give that result much weight and might consider how to get additional feedback from that type of person. Alternatively, if the average score is the result of responses from 100 people and the average score is lower than you want to meet your goals for your court, your team might consider looking more closely at that issue.

The “count” queries are:

- al: Access to the Courts 1-10 (Count)** which shows you the number of responses to questions 1-10 on the survey;
- all: Fairness 11-15 (Count)** which shows you the number of responses to questions 11-15 on the survey;
- all2: Fairness 11-15 (SRL-Count)** which shows you the number of responses to questions 11-15 on the survey from self-represented litigants only (not other court users); and
- aV: SRL Satisfaction 30-36 (Count)** which shows you the number of responses to questions 30-36.

C. Reports. There are four reports that present information from the surveys. They are:

- III Court User Information (all court users)** which collects information relating to section III of the Survey;
- III and IV SRL Litigant Information** which collects information relating to sections III and IV of the Survey;
- III/V Other Comments** which collects information relating to sections III and V of the Survey; and
- IV: Helpful and frustrating** which collects information relating to section IV of the Survey.

These reports present information collected from the sections of the report identified in the title of the report. To view these reports, simply open the report after all data is entered.

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